

# Neighbors unleash on ADOT

By Doug Murphy  
Staff Writer

Almost 200 people packed the Kyrene de los Lagos Elementary School multipurpose room Tuesday night to give the Arizona Department of Transportation a piece of their mind when it comes to building a South Mountain Freeway Loop 202 along Pecos Road.

The crowd of people included dozens of freeway opponents holding signs saying "Kids Need Clean Air."

John Rodriguez, who seven weeks ago was appointed to the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team created by ADOT three years ago to help update the freeway's 1988 alignment, read a prepared statement opposing the freeway.

"There are too many unanswered questions about the air quality," said Rodriguez who represents the Lakewood Homeowners Association on the advisory team.

"It is my opinion, at this moment, that any freeway built on or near Pecos would seriously endanger the health of children. I'm for no-build," Rodriguez said to cheers.

The meeting had been organized by Lagos principal Jim Stroger to update parents and neighbors on the freeway study and to allow people to ask questions of ADOT staff and engineers.

But emotions ran high as people

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feared for their health and their homes.

"I don't know if I can even sell my house," said Norma Band who lives near Pecos Road.

"I have asthma and don't know what to do."

ADOT had few solid answers, which didn't help calm nerves as people questioned the fundamental premise that a freeway was even needed.

"Phoenix doesn't have a traffic problem, it has a commuter problem during rush hour. Why aren't we building rail?" asked Joe Debbins, a Lakewood resident and father of three.

"When you look at the map of where people will live and work, they aren't anywhere near this freeway," Bill Richardson said.

Melanie Pai demanded that ADOT involve the Arizona medical community, instead of relying on federal Environmental Protection Agency air quality standards for children's health near a freeway.

But when ADOT sound and air engineer Fred Garcia tried to explain that the department does try to coordinate with other agencies, he was shouted down by members of the audience.

Afterward Pai said that she wants a third party looking at air quality and that ADOT had not taken any steps to address her concerns.

Pai is the founder of Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children, a grassroots community organization opposed to the freeway.

"EPA mandates may or may not be sufficient," she said.

Maricopa County voters approved the freeway in 1988, but funding shortfalls delayed construction. In 2001, ADOT organized a team to review the purpose and need for a South Mountain Loop 202 freeway from Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills, west through South Mountain Park and rejoining I-10 between 51st Avenue and the Loop 101 interchange.

The advisory team will make a recommendation this month on the western route of the freeway.

Pecos Road is the only alternative for the freeway

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Brian A. Barbour/AFN  
**Ahwatukee Foothills resident Melanie Pai speaks out in opposition of the South Mountain Loop 202 on Tuesday night.**

in the eastern portion of the project unless the Gila River Indian Community allows a freeway alignment study on its land.

Despite the verbal battering that ADOT staff received during the meeting, in the end ADOT spokesman Matt Burdick was pleased.

"It actually went better than I had thought," Burdick said.

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